

# **CHAPTER 2**

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **2.1 PROJECT LOCATION**

The Foresthill Divide Community Plan area is located within the County of Placer, California, as shown in Figures 2-1 and 2-2. The Plan area comprises approximately 109 square miles located in the foothills of the western slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, as shown in Figure 2-3. The Plan area is generally bounded by:

- North Fork of the American River, Shirttail Canyon, the watershed of Sugar Pine Reservoir, and Elliott Ranch Road on the west and north.
- West branch of El Dorado Canyon on the east.
- North Fork of the Middle Fork American River and the Middle Fork American River on the south.

The Foresthill Divide is a large ridge located within the American River Watershed that supports numerous small, rural communities. These communities include establishments that are remnants of the Gold Rush era, and are of unique historical and cultural value. As the communities have continued to grow, new developments have been introduced. While the Plan area remains predominantly rural in character, along with other unincorporated areas of the county, the Foresthill Divide has absorbed some of the growth in Placer County. This has resulted in the subdivision of land and the introduction of modern patterns of development characterized by large-lot residential development, development that occurs away from the core of the community, and automobile-oriented development. Development of the Plan area has also resulted in opportunities for re-use of existing structures and sites.

### **2.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES**

The Foresthill Divide Community Plan is a joint effort by staff of the Placer County Planning Department and the Foresthill Divide Community Plan Team (FDCP Team), a working group of seven local residents appointed by the Placer County Board of Supervisors who spent literally hundreds of hours developing Plan Assumptions, a Vision Statement, General Goals, Goals and Policies, and the Land Use Map. The FDCP Team conducted a detailed survey of the residents and property owners on the Divide (Foresthill Community Survey, included as Appendix A to the FDCP), and held a series of Town Hall meetings to give residents of the Divide the opportunity to express their views. All meetings of the FDCP Team were open to the public, and public comment was invited. Subcommittees of the FDCP Team met and prepared reports on such topics as community design, public facilities, economic development, natural resources, public safety, recreation, schools, and traffic and circulation. Four newsletters were published and distributed summarizing progress on the Community Plan. Community Plan adoption will follow public hearings before both the Placer County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

The following General Community Goals were developed based on the results of the Community Survey and comments provided by residents and property owners who attended Town Hall meetings. Along with the Vision Statement, they provide the overall structure or framework for the individual elements of the Foresthill Divide Community Plan. More specific goals and policies for each element are included in the FDCP.

- To develop an interconnected trail system for hiking, biking and equestrian uses extending from the confluence of the North and Middle Forks of the American River easterly to Sugar Pine Reservoir.
- To preserve the community's outstanding visual and aesthetic features, including significant vistas, woodlands, stream and riparian zones, ponds and lakes, and important wildlife habitat areas.
- To protect the community against wildland fires, erosion, water quality degradation and localized flooding.
- To conserve and protect as valuable community assets the natural, cultural and historic resources of the Plan area.
- To encourage mixed-use development within the principal commercial district (i.e., from the Foresthill Divide Middle School easterly along Foresthill Road to the Foresthill Elementary School) and within the historic downtown area.
- To manage the land within the Plan boundaries as a limited and protected resource so that its future uses will be beneficial to the entire community.
- To insure that future development on the Divide will reflect and maintain the forested residential character of the community.
- To provide public facilities in a location that is central to the concentrations of population on the Divide to encourage the interaction of residents and a strong sense of community.
- To provide residential development which is reasonably integrated into the community rather than being physically isolated.
- To ensure that public services and facilities are available to serve the needs created by both existing and future residents and visitors to the Divide.
- To respect and protect existing agricultural uses and timberlands from residential encroachment.
- To encourage and maintain access to public lands, and to protect the boundaries of public lands from residential encroachment.

- To establish as a high priority for the community and the County the development of new employment opportunities and appropriate economic development.
- To recognize that amendments to the Foresthill Divide Community Plan should be minimal until and unless circumstances in the area have changed so significantly that an update of the Plan is necessary; piecemeal amendments to the Plan should be discouraged.

## **2.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT**

The project initiated by the County of Placer is referred to as the proposed “Foresthill Divide Community Plan” and is intended to supersede the 1981 Foresthill General Plan. The FDCP provides an opportunity to comprehensively address issues facing the community and to responsibly and proactively plan for the next 20 years. The FDCP has been developed as a joint effort of the FDCP Team and County Planning Department staff. Excerpts from the Vision Statement developed for the community planning process describe some of the unique attributes of Foresthill and help to clarify the overall purpose and direction of planning efforts, as follows:

The community of Foresthill is located in a special position; between the outer edges of the rapidly-growing population centers in the Sacramento Valley and public forests and park lands. The community rests atop a broad, relatively flat ridge between the two deep river canyons of the North Fork American River and the Middle Fork American River. Foresthill also serves as a primary entry point into the western central Sierra Nevada mountains...Creating more local employment opportunities without substantially degrading the scenic, forested environment of the Divide will be an on-going challenge for the residents of the Plan area...The Foresthill Divide will likely not have a future population large enough to support major new commercial enterprises. Small retail stores, personal services businesses, professional offices, restaurants and similar uses can be expected to be developed within the downtown area which will continue to provide for the daily needs of the residents and visitors while expanding upon the original small town character of the historic area. The historic downtown district will remain as a cherished focal point of the Plan area and will be a source of pride for the community. The traditionally industrial areas near the historical Foresthill townsite will be redeveloped to provide new employment opportunities for residents of the Divide. Expanded tourist and outdoor recreation-oriented businesses will continue to develop as a consequence of the community’s unique location and proximity to public lands. The increased emphasis on outdoor recreation on the public lands surrounding the Foresthill community and the increasing population growth west of the Divide will have substantial effects on the residents of the Plan area. Future growth on the Foresthill Divide should reflect an awareness of and consistency with this vision.

The current Foresthill General Plan would allow for more than 28,000 residents on the Divide if every available parcel of land were to be subdivided to the maximum number of lots allowed. The FDCP concludes that recently-completed improvements to Foresthill Road can serve a total population of less than 12,000 without undesirable traffic congestion. The Land Use Map

(Figure 2-4) proposes a reduction in the maximum buildout population density from 28,000± to 13,500±. The FDCP, Land Use Map and proposed zoning are based on the Vision Statement and General Goals presented above, the results of the Foresthill Community Survey, consideration of specific requests from a number of property owners, and comments furnished by residents and property owners who attended Town Hall meetings sponsored by the FDCP Team and Placer County.

The Foresthill Divide Community Plan, in combination with the Placer County General Plan, is the official statement of Placer County setting forth goals, policies, assumptions, guidelines, standards and implementation measures that will guide the physical, social and economic development of the Foresthill Divide Community Plan area to approximately the year 2022. The Plan will provide overall direction for future growth in the Foresthill Divide. The Community Plan, in combination with the Placer County General Plan, satisfies the requirements of California Planning and Zoning Law. The FDCP is organized into the following elements and sections:

- Community Development Element, including Population and Housing, Land Use, Community Design, Public Facilities and Parks and Recreation
- Resource Management Element, including Natural Resources/Conservation, Open Space, Cultural Resources, and Air Quality
- Transportation and Circulation Element

The goals, policies and implementation measures for each section are described in detail in the corresponding section of Chapter Three of this EIR, Environmental Setting, Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

The final chapter of the FDCP, entitled Implementation, summarizes the implementation measures presented throughout the FDCP, and describes how the FDCP will be implemented through zoning and other methods.

The FDCP also includes a land use and circulation plan for the Plan area. It assigns the following land use designations, as shown on Figure 2-4:

Low Density Residential (1 Dwelling Unit/1 Acre)  
Medium Density Residential (4 DU/1 Ac.)  
Medium Density Residential (6 DU/1 Ac.)  
Medium Density Residential (8 DU/1 Ac.)  
Rural Residential (1 DU/2.3 Ac.)  
Rural Residential (1 DU/4.6 Ac.)  
Rural Residential (1 DU/10 Ac.)  
Ag/Timberland (1 DU/20 Ac.)  
Ag/Timberland (1 DU/40 Ac.)  
Ag/Timberland (1 DU/80 Ac.)  
Ag/Timberland (1 DU/160 Ac.)  
Forestry (160 Ac. Min.)  
Canyon Mixed Use

Historic Downtown Mixed Use  
Mill Site Mixed Use  
Commercial  
Development Reserve  
Industrial  
Public

An important new feature of the FDCP is the creation of several mixed-use districts which will allow for many different activities to occur. The purpose of the Historic Downtown Mixed-Use Area is to provide a resident population in the downtown area. Retail commercial uses, offices, public service buildings, and other traditional downtown businesses would be mixed with single-family and multiple-family residential uses (perhaps even within the same building). Another location on the Divide that receives special consideration in the FDCP is the Old Mill Mixed-Use Area at the west end of the Historic Downtown Mixed-Use Area. The Public area on the west end of the old mill site will be utilized for the new high school, a new elementary school and a forest education facility. The Mill Site Mixed-Use Area immediately adjacent to the school site will house job-generating businesses. This site requires careful planning to accommodate these existing and proposed new uses. The Canyon Mixed-Use Area extends from the Foresthill Road/Mosquito Ridge Road “Y” west to the medical building on the south side of Foresthill Road from the church west to the Starlite Café on the north side of Foresthill Road. This district will provide for retail commercial, tourist commercial, single and multiple family residential, and other uses. These mixed-use districts are one way to accomplish one of the primary goals of the FDCP: residential densities should be located near the core of the community. The FDCP also concentrates additional residential densities east of the Historic Downtown district to provide local traffic circulation throughout the downtown or “Core” area.

The Circulation Diagram is shown in Figure 2-5.

The proposed project also includes rezoning of properties within the Plan area as necessary and required to achieve consistency with the proposed FDCP land use designations. Proposed zoning is shown in Figure 2-6. Consistent with the land use designations of the FDCP, the Plan area is subject to the following zoning designations of the Placer County Zoning Ordinance:

Primary Zone Districts:

AE	=	Agricultural Exclusive
C1	=	Neighborhood Commercial
C2	=	General Commercial
F	=	Farm
FOR	=	Forestry
IN	=	Industrial
INP	=	Industrial Park
O	=	Open Space
OP	=	Office and Professional
RF	=	Residential-Forest
RS	=	Residential Single-Family

RM = Residential Multi-Family  
TPZ = Timberland Production Zone

Mixed Use Districts:

Mill Mixed-Use (IN-Dc)  
Historic Downtown Mixed-Use (C1-Dh/RS-Dh)  
Canyon Mixed-Use (C2-Dc/RS-Dc)

Combining Zone Districts:

-Dh = Design Historic  
-Dc = Design Scenic Corridor  
-UP = Conditional Use Permit Required  
-B = Building Site (minimum lot size)  
-B-X = As shown on map  
-AG = Agriculture  
-MR = Mineral Reserve  
-SP = Special Purpose  
-DL = Density Limitation  
-DR = Development Reserve

Consistent with California Planning and Zoning law, zoning districts are proposed to be adopted concurrently with the FDCP to assure consistency with adopted land use designations.

## **2.4 SURROUNDING LAND USES AND SETTING**

The majority of the Plan area is forested and/or part of the steep topography that slopes to the Middle and North Forks of the American River. Development is primarily concentrated in areas where it can be sustained, including Foresthill, the Todd's Valley subdivision, Baker Ranch, Michigan Bluff, and Yankee Jim's areas. The large northeast portion of the Plan area consists of U.S. Forest Service Timberlands. Forestry uses with 20 to 160 acre minimum lot size requirements are located west of these Timberlands, and surround the Foresthill townsite. The westernmost portion of the Plan area consists of low density residential and rural residential uses, as well as public land owned by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and lands within the Auburn State Recreation Area operated by the California Department of Parks and Recreation under contract with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

## **2.5 RELATIONSHIP TO PLACER COUNTY GENERAL PLAN**

On August 16, 1994, the Placer County Board of Supervisors adopted the Placer County General Plan (PCGP) which establishes an overall framework for development of the unincorporated area of the county and protection of its natural and cultural resources. The goals and policies contained in the PCGP are applicable throughout the county, except to the extent that County authority is preempted by cities within their corporate limits.

The FDCP is one of 22 Community Plans adopted for the unincorporated area of Placer County. As stated in the Placer County General Plan, “[b]ecause of the diverse geography and land uses within the county...individual community plans have been prepared within the framework of the overall county plan to address the unique issues and concerns arising in the different unincorporated areas.” The Plan area is approximately twice the size of the area encompassed by the 1981 Foresthill General Plan, and includes area previously subject to the 1994 Placer County General Plan and the 1981 Weimar/Clipper Gap/Applegate General Plan.

The FDCP provides a more detailed focus on a specific geographic area of the unincorporated county. Some of the goals, policies, and implementation measures contained in the FDCP repeat those goals, policies, and implementation measures contained in the PCGP which pertain to the FDCP area. Other goals, policies, and implementation measures in the FDCP go further to supplement and elaborate upon (but not supersede) those contained in the PCGP to address specific community concerns and issues. In some instances, the FDCP relies entirely on the PCGP to address certain issues which are not unique to the FDCP area and which are more appropriately addressed in a broader sense in the PCGP. In particular, noise relies entirely on the PCGP, while the seismic safety and air quality sections of the FDCP rely on the PCGP for the broader issues, and also contain policies to address issues specific to the Foresthill Divide.

## **2.6 USES OF THE EIR**

The following agencies may use this Program EIR in their decision making on permits and other approvals for development projects and other proposed actions that may follow adoption of the FDCP and rezoning:

**Placer County Air Pollution Control District:** Authority to Construct air quality permits

**State of California Department of Health Services, Office of Drinking Water:** Permits for community water systems

**Placer County Environmental Health Services:** Permits for individual onsite wells and septic systems

**Foresthill Public Utility District:** Provision of community water service

**Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board:** Construction Activities Storm Water General Permits, NPDES Permits, Waste Discharge Requirements, Clean Water Act Section 401 permitting

**California Department of Fish and Game:** Approval of biological mitigation measures, California Endangered Species Act consultation, Streambed Alteration Agreements

**Placer County Transportation Planning Agency, Placer County Department of Public Works, Caltrans, U.S. Forest Service:** Roadway improvements, encroachment permits

**Placer County:** Community Plan approval and subsequent rezoning; tentative maps, parcel maps, conditional use permits

**Placer County Local Agency Formation Commission:** Formation of and/or annexations to special districts, assessment districts, county service areas, etc. to provide additional municipal services

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:** Federal Endangered Species Act consultation

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:** Clean Water Act Section 404 permitting

**Placer County Flood Control and Water Conservation District:** Consultation regarding drainage and flood control